

Press Release

Help Your Neighbours - Oxfordshire Residents Come Together To Beat The Snow

Charity Age Concern has joined forces with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to help residents of the snow-bound county look out for vulnerable neighbours in the worst cold snap seen for decades.

In four days of snow and ice, Oxfordshire residents have gone the extra mile to help support older and vulnerable neighbours in a huge show of community spirit. Meanwhile County Council social care staff have been using 4x4 vehicles to get to the most vulnerable residents who use their services.

But with the severe weather set to continue through the weekend, when more snow is expected, the council and Age Concern are issuing guidance and support information, including contact numbers, to help residents look out for neighbours who may need help.

Paul Cann, Chief Executive of Age Concern Oxfordshire, said: "People have responded brilliantly to the situation, calling on older and vulnerable neighbours, but with a second week of terrible conditions and low temperatures expected, many people will have been essentially house-bound for a dangerously long time."

He added: "Our chief concern is those older residents who are not users of County Council social care services. We and the County are keen to get to them and help, but we need the help of local communities to do that. The Help Your Neighbours information is there to make that easier for people. Sometimes a simple phone call can make that big difference, and help people who are cut off feel less worried."

John Jackson, Director of Social and Community Services at Oxfordshire County Council, said: "We aren't asking people to provide care, we're asking them to get out this weekend, knock on doors, see how vulnerable people in their areas are coping and alert us via the number provided if those people need help.

"It may be as simple as them not having been able to get to the shops, or it may be more specific help. The County and Age Concern can help them if residents can help identify those who need us."

Age Concern and OCC are asking local media to help with the drive by publicising the campaign, and making the support number available on websites. District, town and parish council, as well as county council staff, and other voluntary and community organisations are all being encouraged to promote this campaign in their communities.

Mr Jackson added: "What vital is that the telephone number is not used instead of 999 for emergencies, or for transport-related issues. If people do call it to talk about gritting and so on, it will quickly become over-whelmed."

Help Your Neighbours is advising residents to do the following this weekend and into next week:

1. Visit those in your communities you think may need help - even if you don't know them. Please don't assume someone else has done so, it's better they get five visits than none.
2. Make elderly and vulnerable neighbours aware of the County Council support line – **0845 050 7666**
3. If you think people need specific help with heating, food or medical issues, please call the line yourself and let us know.
4. Sometimes just a simple phone call can do a lot to reassure people who may be anxious and depressed.